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SIPDIS

FOR AF/S - TREGER

STATE PASS TO MCC FOR GAULL

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SUBJECT: ISLAM IN MOZAMBIQUE

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[1](#)B. B) 2004 MAPUTO 1658

[1](#)C. C) MAPUTO 0002

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer James Potts for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Mozambique large Muslim minority has long been a bastion of moderate faith, both in the native African and South Asian immigrant communities. The country has no tradition of militant, anti-western Islamic thought, and post sees no substantial evidence of any Islamic organizations promoting militant action against non-Muslim countries or peoples. Muslim practice has become somewhat more orthodox in recent years, however, as more conservative South Asian immigrants have arrived in country, and as Mozambicans return to apply the lessons from study of Islam overseas. Tensions between native Africans and South Asians have escalated in recent years, since the latter group dominates both economic activity and positions of religious authority throughout Mozambique. Conservative foreign donors such as the African Muslim Agency are active constructing mosques and religious schools, as are many prominent Mozambican Muslim businessmen, generally religious moderates and Frelimo party supporters. With widespread poverty, loose borders, and a broad range of wealthy donors trying to shape Islam in their image, Mozambique finds itself in a struggle to maintain its tradition of religious moderation. END SUMMARY

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Demographics and Migration Patterns  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Only a minority of Mozambicans professes the Islamic faith; Mozambique National Institute of Statistics estimates the country to be 24% Catholic, 22% Protestant, and 20% Muslim, with the rest classified as animist. Muslim leaders insist that their actual numbers are much higher, and they are almost certainly right. New immigrants to Mozambique are heavily Muslim, and new mosque construction in the rural north suggests that Islam has penetrated some nominally animist regions in recent years. The northern provinces - Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa - are predominantly Muslim, especially along the coast, the result of centuries of contact with Arab, East African, and South Asian traders. The central and southern provinces all feature small but influential Muslim populations, with South Asians especially prominent. South Asians have provided religious leadership within the Muslim community since colonial times, when many Indians served as administrators for the Portuguese. Nearly all imams are Mozambican citizens of Indian or Pakistani descent. This leadership has only recently come under serious pressure by native African Muslims.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The vast majority of Mozambicans can be classified as Sunni, with a small Shi minority, largely of Pakistani origin. Within the Shi community is a tiny Ismailite community that owns a wide range of Mozambique most important businesses. The community estimates its own numbers as less than 1,000. (Other Mozambican Muslims claim, however, that Ismailites are a sect, and not really Muslims). Many, perhaps most, native African Mozambicans cannot say whether they are Sunni or Shi, and the distinction has little meaning to them. If anything, people are more likely to identify whether they and their mosque are aligned with Sheik Aminuddin Mohamed of the Islamic Council of Mozambique or with the Mozambican Council of the Ulama, represented by Nasir Lunat. (Both men are Sunni imams of Indian ethnicity, born in Mozambique and trained in Pakistan, but their groups have visions of Islam for Mozambique that differ in subtle but significant ways. Islamic Council followers tend to be native African, Council of the Ulama followers generally South Asian.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) Growing numbers of Muslims from South Asia and East Africa have entered Mozambique in recent years. Many of these migrants see Mozambique as a transit point to South Africa, with a few targeting the United States or Europe. Recent examples of migrants in transit to South Africa include 34 Bangladeshis who were apprehended by Mozambican police after flying from the Comoros into Nampula city in December, and 18 Pakistanis detained in mid-January by authorities at Inchope, Manica province (see reftel C). Nampula is the primary hub for migrants, both as a transit point and also as a magnet for Muslims of a

vast range of nationalities, especially Pakistanis, Indians, Tanzanians, Guineans, Nigerians, Somalis, and Malians. Many are intent on staying; in an early 2004 interview, the national Director of Migration estimated that approximately 500 Pakistanis per month had acquired Mozambican residency documents in the past year. (Some of these were probably from India; the terms Indian and Pakistani are often used interchangeably.) (see refTel A) Many newcomers have also picked up legitimate but illegally secured Mozambican passports. Traffic in illegal passports is a big and dangerous business unto itself, operated by and for Muslim immigrants. On July 16, 2004, Jawed Hashim, a Pakistani immigrant who owned the prominent local J&B Recording label and was widely considered to be a ringleader of illegal passport (and drug trafficking) activities, was murdered outside a Maputo restaurant. His partner, known as Babu, met the same fate in Karachi one month earlier.

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Moderate Mozambique  
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15. (SBU) For most Mozambican Muslims, crime and smuggling seem a world apart. On a Friday night in downtown Maputo, young men and women of all religious backgrounds dance in the open air at the city most popular late night discotheque, directly below the minaret of the city oldest mosque. It is indicative of tolerance and integration among Mozambicans of different religions, which is a source of pride among religious leaders of various faiths. In fact, native African Muslims are arguably more integrated into Mozambican culture than into their own religious community -- native African and South Asian Muslims are quite segregated from each other. For example, the Comunidade Mahometana, a prominent Muslim organization that operates many of the country largest Muslim schools, maintains a rule that only Muslims of Indian origin can be official members of their society, not African Muslims. (All Muslims can enroll in the school, however.)

16. (SBU) Muslim integration is especially notable within the political realm. Both the ruling Frelimo and opposition Renamo parties feature significant Muslim constituencies. Some northern Muslim tribes, particularly the Makonde, have long been part of the Frelimo ruling coalition, even during the party early Marxist phase. South Asian Muslims have also been heavy Frelimo supporters, partly as a means of ensuring business viability. Renamo has historically been the party of the central, non-Muslim tribes, but remained competitive through 2003 based on its ability to draw significant support from the Muslim coastal areas of the north. The 2004 presidential election indicates that Muslims are starting to favor the ruling party in increasing numbers, as evidenced by the massive (15-25%) vote swings toward Frelimo in the Muslim coastal towns of Angoche, Nacala, and Ilha de Mozambique, all of which have Renamo-led municipal governments. In some areas of the country, such as Inhambane province, Muslim religious leaders publicly endorsed Frelimo presidential candidate Armando Guebuza. In others, prominent Muslim businessmen, many of Indian/Pakistani ethnicity, were elected as Frelimo members to the National Assembly. Notably, the Muslim community completely rejected the Independent Party of Mozambique (PIMO), a nominally secular party operating on conservative Islamic principles. PIMO and its presidential candidate, Ya ub Sibindy, campaigned vigorously in the 2004 elections, receiving significant media coverage, but earned less than 1% of the national vote. Educated Muslims were rather embarrassed by PIMO in general, and didn't see any need for a Muslim stealth party.

17. (C) Muslims and other Mozambicans share similar opinions of the United States and its foreign policy. That is, they disagree with U.S. military intervention in the Muslim world but hold little personal animosity toward the U.S. and wish to collaborate on other issues. Mozambicans were almost uniformly opposed to U.S. military action in Iraq, a position reflected in Embassy contacts everywhere, from the Mozambican government to the evangelist churches to the U.S.-Mozambican Chamber of Commerce. Mozambicans are often equally unsupportive of U.S. activities in Afghanistan, even among those who know that Usama Bin Laden planned the 9/11 attacks from a base there. The most common argument was summed up to Emboff by a Muslim Renamo delegate in the National Assembly, who said that Mozambique must oppose U.S. military intervention to stand in solidarity with other poor countries, who, though they may have terrible governments, nonetheless deserve the right to peaceful internal change rather than change forced from outside. Opposition is almost never publicly stated in explicit religious terms. Sheik Aminuddin, Mozambique leading imam and Muslim scholar, has used his weekly newspaper column to criticize U.S. treatment of Muslims in general, but has not defined the U.S. action in Iraq as specifically anti-Muslim. In fact, opposition is rarely stated in public at all -- despite anger with U.S. policy over Iraq,

only two demonstrations were held, on March 14 and March 15, 2003. Post estimates that about 1,500 people participated in the second march, a peaceful affair organized by the Islamic Council of Mozambique. Some of the marchers and organizers have since turned out to be Embassy contacts.

18. (C) New Muslim immigrants have not significantly altered the tone of moderation in Mozambique, but some groups are trying. One such organization is Jama'at al-Tabligh (JT), a society based in India and Pakistan that is dedicated to a very conservative, almost pre-modern vision of Islam. JT has increased its membership (known locally as "tablikis") in recent years on the strength of new immigration from Pakistan and the Gujarat, and has financed the arrival of many missionaries from South Asia. JT's emir is based in Beira; its activities appear to be nationwide. Women affiliated with JT are often veiled and fully covered -- a sight that is increasingly common throughout Mozambique, and not just with JT associates. Post has no evidence linking JT or similar groups with potential terrorist activity.

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Rising Economic Force  
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19. (SBU) Prominent secular figures in the Muslim community have been less concerned with protest and more concerned with profits. In particular, Mozambicans of South Asian origin dominate the trade and money exchange sectors. They also own a growing share of the agricultural processing and hotel industry. Muslim-owned businesses feature prominently in Mozambique Top 100 companies list, compiled by the KPMG consulting firm and issued in December 2004. The two largest private, principally Mozambican-owned companies were Africom and Delta Trading (11th and 12th overall), with Merez and Gani Comercial close behind. The primary owners of these companies are Mozambican citizens of Indian or Pakistani origin. Africom and Merez were established by recent Indian immigrants in 1994 and 1998, respectively, and gained dominant market share in flour, wheat, maize, and coconut oil processing shortly thereafter. The companies are thought to be well-managed, and to have benefitted from a favorable arrangement with the government, in which they are nearly exempt from taxes.

110. (SBU) Delta Trading fits the more negative archetype image commonly imputed to businesses owned by South Asian Mozambicans: the company focuses on the import of goods from South Asia and China; its owners are third-generation Mozambicans but its managers are largely new immigrants; and it has been plagued through the years by rumors of contraband and smuggling in hashish, heroin, and other drugs. There are many others of this type, with Gani Comercial, Grupo Gulamo, and the MBS Group among the more prominent ones. The first two are both importer-exporters and agricultural processors (tea, cashews, flour) based in Nacala and Nampula. In August 2003, Mohamed Aquil Rajahussen, CEO of Grupo Gulamo, launched Air Corridor, Mozambique first private commercial airline to operate nationwide (see controversy regarding Air Corridor in reflet B). The MBS Group is primarily a clothing retailer that has transformed itself quickly into a multimillion-dollar empire; MBS is now financing the construction of the country largest shopping center, located in downtown Maputo. Both MBS and Grupo Gulamo declined to turn in financial information for the KPMG survey; media reports suggest fear of auditing.

111. (C) Most Indian-Pakistani businesses are suspected by public opinion to be smugglers, but, to some extent, "involvement in contraband" is just a reflection of the bribes that must be paid to local authorities in order to stay in business in Mozambique. In recent years, however, Gani Comercial and Grupo Gulamo members have been arrested for smuggling hashish; each was able to buy its way out of prosecution. MBS is more notorious yet. Local authorities and religious leaders assert that the company has a sweetheart relationship with FRELIMO in which it does not have to pay import duties or taxes for any products. In exchange, goods ordered by key FRELIMO party members, including President Chissano and family, are sold to them at sub-market prices. This type of arrangement is reportedly replicated to a lesser extent by other south Asian import-export businesses, such as the owners of Tiger Shopping Center in Maputo. These businessmen are among the major donors to the construction of mosques, schools, and religious charities throughout Mozambique.

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Who Owns the Mosques and Schools?  
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112. (SBU) Numerous building projects are underway in Mozambique, but no sector is more vibrant than mosque construction and rehabilitation. In the past few years

Muslim school construction has also taken off. Financiers of specific mosques are at times hard to identify, but broad patterns are easily detected. The most prominent new mosques are the work of Mozambican businessmen building, in part, shiny monuments to themselves. In a second group are mosques in communities which rely on support from the Islamic Council or the Comunidade Mahometana (mentioned in para 5 above) -- Mozambican organizations which depend to some extent on contributions from local businessmen. The main difference between these two organizations is that the leadership of the former is made up of native Africans and ethnic South Asians who have been in Mozambique for generations, whereas recent South Asian immigrants dominate the latter. Also, the Islamic Council receives significant funding from the Saudi Arabian government for its activities; it is unclear how much goes into mosque construction. Finally, many poorer Muslim communities in the north rely directly on foreign organizations for rehabilitation of their smaller mosques.

13. (SBU) Nasir Lunat, president of the Council of the Ulama, is unique in that he is not only an imam but also one of the most prominent local benefactors of mosque construction. Nasir and family own the Maputo currency exchange house Lunat Cambios and he was also a FRELIMO representative in the National Assembly from 1995-2000. Lunat Cambios was one of the principal exchange houses used for money laundering purposes in the BCM scandal, Mozambique worst bank fraud (the investigation of which led to the murder of prominent journalist Carlos Cardoso). Lunat was the imam at Maputo Polana Mosque until 2001. After leaving Polana, Lunat has been the driving force and ostensibly leading financier behind construction of the impressive new Taqwa Mosque in central Maputo. Religious practices are more conservative at Taqwa than at Polana -- for example, in contrast to most Maputo mosques, Taqwa has no prayer rooms for women. This has raised suspicions that the real financiers are fundamentalists from other countries.

14. (C) Other South Asian-Mozambican businessmen-as-donors include Mohamed Bashir Suleiman, owner of MBS, who gave a reported \$1 million in 2003-2004 for reconstruction of Mozambique Baixa Mosque, in downtown Maputo. The Gulamo family, who number among the few Shi'as in the north, has built the new Gulamo Mosque in Nampula, rebuilt the Central Mosque on Ilha de Mocimboa, and is building another mosque in Nampula. The Gani family has built two mosques in Nacala. In Pemba, Osman Yacob, by far the biggest businessman in town, has built the Osman Yacob Mosque.

15. (C) Many Mozambican Muslims see these figures as corrupt, with lifestyles that are obviously not in line with Muslim principles, and resent the influence of these figures in their religious lives. Sources indicate that Nasir Lunat was fired as imam of Polana Mosque (the mosque of choice for Maputo intellectuals) because many considered that his involvement in money laundering made him an inappropriate spiritual leader. Shortly thereafter the Baixa Mosque turned down Lunat offer of hundreds of thousands of dollars for reconstruction. The old mosque also turned down a million-dollar donation from MBS, but eventually accepted the money after Mohamed Bashir swore an oath (apparently in tears) that he had been a good Muslim and was not involved in corrupt activities. Despite this oath, in 2004 many worshipers left the mosque because of his reputation and set up their own makeshift place of worship in the second floor of a nearby building. Northern cities have also seen their mosques fracture and subdivide in recent years for similar reasons. For example, the South Asian community left Nampula venerable Cuat Islam mosque in the 1990 due to a squabble over whether certain businessmen should be allowed to fund reconstruction. The South Asians are now found primarily at the Central Mosque, and the Cuat Islam Mosque now appears dilapidated with an entirely native African population.

16. (C) Foreign contributors are also present in mosque construction, including the Kuwait-based African Muslim Agency (AMA) and also the South Africa-based Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal (JUT). AMA, largely financed and staffed in Mozambique by South African citizens of South Asian descent, has constructed a wide range of smaller mosques throughout northern Mozambique and also provides support to the madrassas. AMA projects include at least five mosques in Nampula city, the Islamic Cultural Center in Nacala, and the Omar Bun al-Kattab mosque in Pemba. AMA financing has also been reported in very small rural communities in Nampula and Cabo Delgado provinces. Sources claim that JUT has channeled Saudi Arabia-based sources and clerics for support of Taqwa Mosque. AMA and JUT mosques tend to have a more conservative tone, but do not appear to preach radical Islam. Conservative mosques will appeal to certain Mozambicans, especially poor people alienated by wealthy, westernized mosque builders. AMA has also attracted some support among native Africans by challenging South Asian



religious leaders who charge their followers for marriage, burial, and other services. The AMA has also taken a rather moderate approach to questions of women's dress; sources suggest that this has been done out of cultural necessity in northern Mozambique, rather than conviction. AMA-financed mosques have not, however, elevated native African Mozambicans to positions of authority (such as imam or mualimo) and still are viewed with suspicion by many. AMA has also clashed with northern Muslims over its efforts to eradicate traditional Mozambican customs within the mosques. In 2003 a dispute about proper practice of Islam at Pemba prominent Paquitequete mosque degenerated into a public fistfight between AMA staff and locals. A similar incident was reported in Quissanga, also in Cabo Delgado province. The final verdict on AMA influence is difficult to categorize neatly.

17. (C) Some Middle Eastern and East African governments also provide modest but significant support for religious activities. Egypt is reportedly the only country that has a direct bilateral agreement with the Mozambican government to provide such aid, which comes primarily in the form of Arabic, math and science teachers for Muslim primary and secondary schools. Some medical assistance is also provided. Other governments provide direct assistance to non-governmental organizations; for example, Saudi Arabia works directly with the Islamic Council to set up medical clinics and run other charities. Some recruiting for educational programs takes place in these contexts. Other countries have provided state-sponsored religious aid in the past, recruiting for potentially more dangerous activities. Sheik Aminuddin explained to Emboff that the Iranian embassy had provided significant religious aid to Mozambique in the 1980s and early 1990s. He commented that their agenda was very politicized, that they were openly seeking recruits, and that Mozambicans were not receptive to their entreaties. Iran has since pulled its embassy and aid programs from Mozambique.

18. (C) Foreign Muslim aid groups have played an especially large role in education. Munazzamaat Dawat Islamia, affiliated with the Sudanese government, has for many years provided scholarships to religious schools in Sudan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. Some students on scholarship focus on science and technology, rather than pure religious instruction. MDI has built a school and mosque in Nacala and is now doing the same in Xai-Xai, Gaza province. The AMA, JUT, and Saudi Arabian charities have also provided scholarships for religious study in South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and elsewhere. The vast majority of those who travel to Sudan and Saudi Arabia are native African; scholars of South Asian descent are more likely to choose South Africa or Pakistan. Observers note that Mozambicans who study Islam for several years overseas tend to return more serious and more committed to implementing strict Islamic practices. All Embassy contacts insist that there are no signs of radicalization, however. One contact, who attended Medina University in Saudi Arabia on scholarship, told Emboff that he knew classmates from other countries who had gone off to fight the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq. He said that Mozambicans have no interest in such adventures, emphasizing that Mozambicans have a duty to take advantage of an educational opportunity that does not exist in Mozambique and apply knowledge at home. (Note: Mozambican cultural contact with Saudi Arabia is low; for example, only 350 Mozambicans are estimated to have made the pilgrimage to Mecca this season, a slight decline from previous years.) Another contact who had spent time in Egypt on a scholarship said that such educational opportunities are often the only way that native Africans can get the training necessary to attain positions of religious authority. Despite receiving an extensive education overseas, many native Africans who return home with impressive theological credentials still have difficulty finding positions of religious authority in a hierarchy dominated by South Asians. Native African embassy sources are visibly bitter about this.

19. (SBU) Increasingly, formal Islamic educational opportunities (beyond the madrassas) are starting to take place in Mozambique. Mozambique has long-standing Muslim schools in most of the major cities; these schools generally provide instruction in Portuguese only and often are funded by the Comunidade Mahometana. There are also small schools in Nampula, Nacala, and Quelimane that provide instruction only in Arabic. Post has not been able to determine the funding sources behind such schools. No Muslim universities exist, per se, but the Mussa Bin Bique University in Nampula was started in 2003 to address this need. The AMA pulled funding, however, when its directors refused to adapt to AMA's rather conservative religious vision of the school. The school now is operated by the Ministry of Justice and does not provide religious education, though many of its students and all of its administrators are all Muslim. The Embassy provided support to build an American corner (much of the school small library) at Mussa Bin Bique in 2004.

120. (SBU) In 2003 Sheik Aminuddin opened Hamza School in Matola (near Maputo), Mozambique first school that provides instruction in both Portuguese and Arabic. The school operates as a boarding school for boys and as a day school for girls, attracting students from across the country, almost all of them native Africans. Tuition is free. (As are funeral services provided on school grounds; this is somewhat of a slap at the South Asian community, which insists on its own separate, more expensive rites.) Instruction is traditional but not fundamentalist. Education for girls is focused as a preparation for motherhood, but the Sheik also teaches that women should be encouraged to work in a professional capacity outside the home and can even become president of the country. Financing for the school has come from Mozambican businessmen, according to the Sheik, who adds that some of them are "probably not the best Muslims." Sheik Aminuddin plans to open another school in Pemba in 2005. Only one mile down the road, the Aga Khan Foundation has started construction on an ambitious new secondary school. The school, while operated by an Ismailite Muslim foundation, will not provide religious education, will charge tuition and is expected to attract elite Mozambicans of all religious backgrounds.

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The Ismailites  
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121. (SBU) The economic strength of the Ismailite community in Mozambique has grown exponentially in recent years. Mozambican Muslims have looked on skeptically. Though reportedly fewer than 1,000 in number, Ismailites own the two largest private Mozambican-owned businesses, Africom and Delta Trading -- along with Merez, the Hotel VIP, several small computer services and technology companies, and ISCTEM (a Maputo university). The Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development owns the prestigious Hotel Polana. Ismailites are something of a mystery to Mozambicans; the Ismailite Aga Khan mosque in Maputo has always been a closed community, mysterious and inaccessible to most Mozambican Muslims. At the same time, Ismailites express social values that are alarmingly progressive for some Muslims, particularly with regard to the role of women, dress patterns and education. Embassy sources have also claimed (rather scornfully) that major donors, such as the Gulamo family and Mohamed Bashir, are "Ismailites," even though it seems clear that they are not. "Ismailite" has come to be a term used loosely by religious leaders and other Muslims to deride local Indian-Pakistani businessmen who have grown too big for their britches and too far from Islam. Ismailites, for their part, have made an effort to strengthen bonds to the broader Muslim community by funding local charity programs and also by providing support through the Aga Khan Foundation, which carries out agriculture, health and education programs in Cabo Delgado province.

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Final Thoughts  
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122. (C) The Muslim community in Mozambique has some clear lines of fission: South Asians vs. native Africans; rich vs. poor; the Council of the Ulama vs. the Islamic Council; corrupt vs. disenfranchised; modern vs. traditional. Yet these divisions are not always mutually reinforcing. For instance, different groups of South Asians represent the far end of both modern and fundamentalist Islam. Through financing of new mosques, businessmen of questionable repute are promoting several different versions of Islamic teaching. The Islamic Council is the more moderate religious organization, but receives direct funding from the Saudi Arabian government. Despite these complications and ironies, the good news is that the center, as represented by the imams in the more traditional mosques and their followers, appears to be holding nicely. Any signs of possible radicalization among the Muslim population are extremely difficult to detect. But if Mozambique extreme poverty continues without much improvement, the beautiful new and largely moderate mosques may become associated with rich, corrupt, and politically connected Indians and Pakistanis. Young people could begin turning in numbers toward fundamentalist alternatives that already exist in the country. Thankfully, all signs indicate that Mozambique is not there yet.

LALIME